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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000113

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SUBJECT: PM COMMITS TO UNSCR 1701/BORDER CONTROL

Classified By: Ambassador Michele Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Hariri met with UNSCOL Michael Williams and ambassadors from key donor nations on February 2 to assure them that border control remains a high priority for his government. In order to address donor concerns, Hariri, who as chair of the Ministerial Border Committee (MBC) will continue to provide political leadership to the project, has established a technical team led by his senior advisor and former Finance Minister Mohammad Chatah. The team is to develop within one month a comprehensive border control plan with security and socio-economic components. The plan will incorporate all border crossings and will require cooperation among the ministers of defense, interior, finance, foreign affairs and transportation -- all present at the meeting. A senior-level coordinator of the project will be named soon, Hariri said. While meeting the requirements of UNSCR 1701 remains a commitment, Hariri added that he must focus on the socio-economic aspects in order to "sell" the project to the cabinet. Engagement with Syria is important, he said, not just for border delineation but also to address common socio-economic concerns in the border region. End Summary.

BORDER CONTROL A PRIORITY

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Saad Hariri met February 2 with UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams, the ambassadors from the U.S., UK, Denmark, Germany and EU, and the French DCM to outline his government's plans to address donor concerns about the lack of strategic direction and planning in border control. Calling border control "important" and a "priority", he assigned responsibility for the project to the MBC and highlighted that the effort cannot succeed without a socio-economic component. Addressing specific donor concerns, Hariri said that the border control project will include all land, sea and air border crossings and will require cooperation among the ministers of defense, interior, finance, foreign affairs and transportation - all present at the meeting.

STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP COMING SOON

¶3. (C) The PM announced the formation a technical team led by his senior advisor (and former Finance Minister) Mohammad Chatah and tasked with developing a comprehensive strategic plan within one month. The team, made up of experts from all of the key ministries, will delineate a specific plan of action for short-, mid- and long-term goals. After review by the MBC, will be presented to the cabinet for endorsement. The PM also announced his intention to appoint a senior-level official after consultation with the cabinet and the president to coordinate the work of the MBC.

DOWNPLAY 1701 FOR MARKETING PURPOSES

¶4. (C) While noting the importance of UNSCR 1701, PM Hariri

repeatedly stressed the importance of the socio-economic development component rather than just the security aspects of the proposed border control plan. Prefacing his remarks by commenting that Lebanon has had a difficult four years and the current government presents a real opportunity, Hariri said that in order to "sell" border control, there should be "less talk" about UNSCR 1701. "Selling" it, he said, would require concentrating on the benefits of the project, such as effects on the smuggling of children and goods. "While some are interested in weapons smuggling", he continued, "we are (also) looking at drugs, smuggling and dumping." It will not be easy, Hariri concluded, as the project will involve extensive internal debate. Lessons have been learned from the northern border pilot project, he said. People are used to crossing the border freely to attend school, buy goods or get health care.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA IMPORTANT

15. (C) UNSCOL Williams and several of the donor ambassadors noted the importance of UNSCR 1701, praised the PM for efforts to improve relations with Syria, and highlighted the need for work on both sides of Lebanon's borders. Hariri agreed that engagement was important and said he planned to pursue border delineation and demarcation, but at a later date. He stressed that engagement with Syria must include a discussion of the social and economic issues. Williams announced that he was planning to speak with the Syrians soon about border issues.

16. (C) COMMENT: PM Hariri's expressions of a strong

BEIRUT 00000113 002 OF 002

commitment to putting border control back on the front burner were welcome, as were his efforts to address key donor concerns about a lack of GOL coordination and the need for a clear strategy for border control. While his support for a socio-economic approach is understandable, we believe the focus needs to remain on the requirements of UNSCR 1701. The key for us will be to work with other donors to ensure that Lebanon develops the capacity to control its borders and stem the flow of illegal weapons as it works with Syria to resolve critical impediments such as border delineation and armed Palestinian military camps straddling the frontier.

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